

REMARKS

The present claim amendments are responsive to the Examiner's concerns noted in the Office Action.

Examiner Interview

Applicant appreciates the courtesy of a telephonic interview with the Examiners on November 8, 2006. At the interview, the Schroth reference was discussed in relation to the claims. In particular, the Examiner agreed in principle that the sliding surfaces between the punch and shaft in the present invention is different from the ball cage disclosed in Schroth.

Allowable Subject Matter

Applicant appreciates the Examiner's indication of patentable subject matter in Claims 14-17 and 21-24. These claims have not been rewritten in independent form given the traversal of the rejections of the base independent claims below.

Summary of the Response

Claims 1, 11, 14, 15, 24 and 26 have been amended. Claims 6, 13 and 25-28 are withdrawn. Claims 1-28 remain pending in this application. Reexamination and reconsideration of the present application as amended are respectfully requested.

Claim Rejections Under 35 USC 112

Claims 1, 11 and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. Appropriate amendments have been made to traverse this rejection.

Claim Rejections Under 35 USC 102

Claims 1-5, 7-12, 18-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Schroth et al (US 6,311,597 B1).

On the outset, Applicant notes that Schroth is not an effective 102(b) reference. Schroth issued on November 6, 2001, but the present invention relied on an earliest priority of August 16, 2002, which is less than one year from the issue date of Schroth. Accordingly, Schroth is not a proper 102(b) reference. Given the traversal of the rejection below, Applicant has not had an opportunity to consider the option of swearing behind the Schroth reference, but reserves the right to do so should the need arise in the future.

Referring to Fig. 3 in Schroth, it is directed to a punch and die set which relies on a ball cage 112 between a stripper guide bushing 109 and a die nest guide bushing 206 to allow for relative motions between the parts. In contradistinction, the claimed invention requires a punch guide having a shaft guiding the punch relative to the die, wherein the shaft is sized and shaped to receive the punch in slidable contact, and wherein the punch and the shaft have flat sliding contact surfaces in a sliding direction. Such sliding contact surfaces are not disclosed in Schroth. Schroth therefore does not anticipate the invention defined in independent claims 1 and 11, and all the dependent claims.

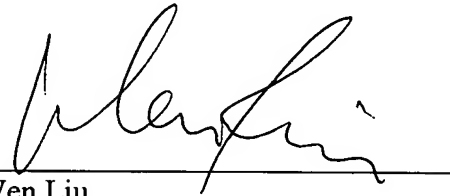
Reconsideration of Withdrawn Claims

Applicant respectfully requests rejoining and reconsidering the previously presented but withdrawn claims, in view of allowable generic claims 1 and 11.

CONCLUSION

In view of all the foregoing, Applicant submits that the claims pending in this application are patentable over the references of record and are in condition for allowance. Such action at an early date is earnestly solicited. **The Examiner is invited to call the undersigned representative to discuss any outstanding issues that may not have been adequately addressed in this response.**

Respectfully submitted,



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